

The Athenian agora and the progress of Christianity

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ALISON FRANTZ, *THE ATHENIAN AGORA XXIV: LATE ANTIQUITY: A.D. 267-700* (American School of Classical Studies at Athens, Princeton 1988). Pp. xxi + 156, 76 plates. ISBN 0-87661-224-9. \$65.

Alison Frantz's long-awaited account of the Athenian agora in late antiquity deserves warm welcome. It gathers a vast quantity of previously scattered archaeological material, and weaves it into a coherent historical narrative. In addition, the two most prominent monuments that survive from this period, the Palace (hitherto 'Gymnasium') of the Giants, and the post-Herulian wall, are exhaustively treated in chapters by Homer Thompson and the late John Travlos respectively. The post-Herulian wall remains a highly visible reaction to the Herulian incursion of 267/68, the first of three barbarian invasions around which Frantz articulates her cyclical drama of catastrophe and revival. The Palace of the Giants symbolizes the much faster revival that took place after Alaric's assault in 396. But from the Slavic invasion of c.582, there was to be only a brief and modest recovery before the onset of the 'dark ages'.

It must be emphasised at the outset — and because of the strictly Athenian focus of this book — that the evolution of Athens' urban tissue is not untypical of the wider Aegean and even eastern Mediterranean region. A period of expansion and prosperity was terminated by the Herulian invasion of 267/68. Though the city wall had recently been restored, this attack seems to have taken the Athenians by surprise, so resistance had to be conducted from nearby Mount Aigaleos.¹ A shorter wall was subsequently constructed, and was believed until very recently to have enclosed only a limited area north of the Acropolis. Frantz and Travlos work on this assumption, but Manolis Korres has now suggested that the wall continued round the Acropolis, embracing the Odeum of Herodes Atticus and the temple of Asclepius but not the theatre of Dionysus.² This sort of defensive contraction is common, as for example in Lycia, where the late Roman circuit-walls often enclose no more than the original Lycian (i.e. pre-hellenistic) core of the settlement.³ The Athenian wall was not built in a great hurry — the latest coins found in it are of Probus (276-82) and Maximian (286-305) (Frantz p.6). In consequence, some care could be taken with aesthetic effect — one might compare (for both extent and aesthetics) the 3rd-c. fortifications of Lycian Oenoanda,⁴ but not (*pace* Frantz p.5 n.38) the extremely rough-and-ready structure at Olympia.⁵ The post-Herulian circuit determined in large degree the late-antique history of the agora. Some of the area's monuments, such as the library of Pantaenus, were taken down and recycled as wall; and the agora was thenceforth excluded from the defended heart of the city, and condemned to over a century of stagnation. Travlos's detailed description of the wall, with an interesting selection of photographs, is a model of what needs to be done

- 1 G. Fowden, "City and mountain in late Roman Attica," *JHS* 108 (1988) 48-53, questioning also the traditional assumption (repeated by Frantz p.2) that the resistance was led by the historian Dexippus. Strangely, Frantz regards this resistance as the reason "why the Acropolis seems to have escaped damage" (p.2). But Dexipp. (*FGH* 100) fr.28 makes plain that the Heruls took control of the city; and the most authoritative recent study of the Parthenon's fabric (ignored by Frantz) supports Travlos's view that it was burned in 267: M. Korres and Ch. Bouras, *Μελέτη αποκαταστάσεως τοῦ Παρθενώου* (Athens 1983) 136-37. With the Athenians' ambush of the Heruls in the Daphni pass, which I suppose (*JHS* 108 [1988] 53), compare General Makriyannis's flight after the siege of Athens (*Ἀπομνημονεύματα*, ed. Y. Vlachoyiannis [Athens 1947²] 1. 294: Πᾶμεν ἀπὸ τὸ Δαφνὶ νὰ περάσομεν, ἦταν γιομάτο Τούρκοι. Τοὺς φεύγομεν ἀπὸ κεῖ καὶ μέσα τὰ γκρεμνὰ σωθήκαμεν εἰς τὴν Ἐλεψίνα...
- 2 M. Korres, *A.D.* 35 (1980 [1988]) B'1, 18-19.
- 3 E.g. W. W. Wurster and M. Wörrle, "Die Stadt Pinara," *AA* 1978, 99. See also the more general survey of walls by D. Claude, *Die byzantinische Stadt im 6. Jahrhundert* (Munich 1969) 15-41.
- 4 E. C. Stenton and J. J. Coulton, "Oinoanda: the water supply and aqueduct," *AS* 36 (1986) fig.7 (showing the late Roman circuit and its ampler hellenistic precursor); C. W. Chilton (ed.), *Diogenes of Oenoanda: the fragments* (Oxford 1971) pl.III.
- 5 A. Mallwitz, "Olympia und Rom," *AW* 19 (1988) 42-44, emphasizes the haste with which the Olympia wall was built, and provides a revised plan.